

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 OMB-01 /088 W
-----093980 160830Z /12

R 160649Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8719
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
CINCPAC HONOLULU
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 2676

E.O.11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: MOPS, PBOR, PINT, ET, SO
SUBJ: RECENT MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA

SUMMARY: FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE DESCRIBED ETHIOPIAN MILITARY POSITION IN ERITREA AS RELATIVELY STABLE AND MOVING TOWARD MAJOR BUILDUP. HE CHARACTERIZED CONTINUED FIGHTING IN OGADEN AS INTENSE WITH ETHIOPIAN FORTUNES DETERIORATING. HE DID NOT BELIEVE DJIBOUTI/ADDIS RAILROAD COULD REMAIN OPEN FOR EXTENDED PERIOD. OVERALL IMPRESSION WHICH HE GAVE WAS ONE OF ETHIOPIA STILL UNDER INTENSE MILITARY PRESSURES FROM SOMALIA AND IN NORTH. END SUMMARY.

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1. EMBOFF MET WITH RESIDENT FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE (PROTECT) JUNE 13 TO DISCUSS CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA. AMONG SUBJECTS DISCUSSED WERE ERITREA, OGADEN AND DJIBOUTI/ADDIS RAILROAD.

2. ERITREA - MILATT BELIEVED THAT MORALE OF BARENTU GARRISON IN WESTERN ERITREA WAS DECLINING AND HE ESTI-

MATED THAT ONLY 2300 TROOPS REMAIN THERE. HE SAID THAT ALL SUPPLIES FOR TROOPS NOW HAD TO BE AIR DROPPED BECAUSE ETHIOPIANS COULD NO LONGER ASSURE SECURITY FOR AIR STRIP. (COMMENT: OTHER INFORMATION INDICATES BARENTU IS BEING RESUPPLIED BY HELICOPTER FLIGHTS REGULARLY.) SITUATION IN ASMARA HAD NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THAT OF SIX WEEKS AGO, WITH CITY ENCIRCLED BY SECESSIONIST FORCES. FRENCH EMBASSY HAS ESTIMATED THAT A DAILY AVERAGE OF SIX AN-12 FLIGHTS WERE BEING USED TO SUPPLY ASMARA, THUS INDICATING THAT ETHIOPIANS WERE STILL IN CONTROL OF YOHANNES IV AIR FIELD. IN ASSAB, HE CLAIMED THAT NEARLY 200,000 TONS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT WAS NOW BACKED UP AND IT HAD BECOME A LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARE. HOWEVER, THERE IS LITTLE OR NO SECURITY THREAT TO ASSAB AREA. MILATT HAD RECEIVED ONE REPORT THAT ETHIOPIAN TROOPS HAD ACTUALLY CROSSED TEKAZZE RIVER INTO ERITREA AT OM HAGER NEAR SUDAN BORDER AND WERE HOLDING POSITION ON NORTHERN SIDE OF RIVER. (EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS REPORT IS ACCURATE, BUT ETHIOPIA IS CONTINUING TO BUILD UP FORCES SOUTH OF TEKAZZE RIVER FOR EVENTUAL PUSH INTO ERITREA ALONG SUDAN BORDER.) MILATT FURTHER STATED THAT FRENCH EMBASSY DJIBOUTI HAS REPORTED RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT MAJOR ELEMENTS OF ETHIOPIA'S THIRD DIVISION, FORMERLY STATIONED IN HARAR (OGADEN) HAVE ALREADY MOVED

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NORTH, BUT HE COULD NOT SPECIFY WHETHER TO GONDAR OR MAKALE. IN GENERAL ASSESSMENT, MILATT COULD NOT FORESEE MAJOR OFFENSIVE BEGINNING IN ERITREA BEFORE 4 OR 5 MONTHS OR LONGER. PREFACING REMARKS AS PERSONAL, HE EVEN SPECULATED THAT THERE WOULD NEVER BE AN OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA, BUT RATHER A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF LIMITED ACTIONS AROUND MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS AND TO OPEN MAIN ROAD ARTERIES.

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3. OGADEN - MILATT HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS REPORTS OF INTENSE GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN SOUTHERN OGADEN AND HE BELIEVES THAT SITUATION THERE IS DETERIORATING FOR ETHIOPIANS. HE CHARACTERIZED ETHIOPIAN LOSSES AS MORE THAN JUST MINOR. AS A RESULT, HE CLAIMED THAT AN ORDER WAS SENT ABOUT 10 DAYS AGO FROM ADDIS ABABA TO THE EASTERN SECTOR COMMANDER TO "TAKE ALL NECESSARY MEASURES" TO BRING SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. ONE CONSEQUENCE OF ORDER, MILATT CLAIMED, HAS BEEN EITHER CONFISCATION OR KILLING OF MANY PACK ANIMALS SUCH AS CAMELS AND DONKEYS. HOWEVER, HE HAS NOT HEARD OF ANY MASSIVE REPRISALS AGAINST OGADEN CIVILIAN POPULATION. HE COULD NOT CONFIRM WHETHER REGULAR SOMALI
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FORCES WERE BEING REINFILTRATED INTO OGADEN, BUT ASSERTED AUTHORITATIVELY THAT MASSIVE SOMALI MATERIAL SUPPORT WAS CONTINUING FOR INSURGENTS AT LEVEL MUCH HIGHER THAN PRE-JULY 1977 INSURGENCY PERIOD. HE BELIEVED IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR SOMALI GOVERNMENT (GSDR) TO STOP ITS SUPPORT TO INSURGENTS.

4. DJIBOUTI/ADDIS RAILROAD - ONCE AGAIN IN PERSONAL VEIN, MILATT WAS CONVINCED THAT IT WOULD BE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP RAILROAD OPEN. HE SPECULATED THAT FIRST FEW TRAINS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO TRAVEL ALONG RAIL UNHINDERED, BUT THAT BECAUSE GSDR REALLY COULD NOT CONTROL FULLY SO-CALLED WESTERN SOMALI LIBERATION

FRONT (WSLF), IF WSLF WISHED TO BLOW UP RAILROAD, IT COULD. HE SAID ETHIOPIANS HAVE TRIED TO CREATE AN ISSA-PARA-MILITARY FORCE TO GUARD THE RAILROAD, BUT THAT IT WAS PROBABLY INSUFFICIENT TO PREVENT SABOTAGE. HE SAID HE COULD NOT PREDICT WHAT ETHIOPIA'S REACTIONS MIGHT BE TO SOMALI SABOTAGE OF THE RAILROAD.

5. MILATT SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THAT ETHIOPIANS/SOVIETS WERE HAVING SOME TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES WITH MIG-23 AIRCRAFT. (HE HAS STATED IN PAST THAT ETHIOPIANS WILL RECEIVE TOTAL OF 24 MIG-23'S AND THAT HE BELIEVES NEARLY ALL HAVE ALREADY BEEN DELIVERED.) HE SAID TECHNICAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IGNITION AND TAKE-OFF SYSTEM AT ETHIOPIAN ALTITUDE AND "OXYGEN SYSTEM" WHICH HE COULD NOT EXPAND ON FURTHER. (WHILE HE BELIEVE ONLY THREE OF MIG-23'S WERE OPERATIONAL, EMBASSY BELIEVES PROBABLY AT LEAST 10 ARE SO.) MILATT STATED THAT MODIFICATION KITS HAVE BEEN ORDERED FOR MIG'S TO RESOLVE IGNITION AND OTHER TECHNICAL PROBLEMS.
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Message Attributes

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